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ABSTRACT

At Tomball College, in Texas, an interdisciplinary course in gender issues was developed to examine the psychological and social realities of gender roles. The course was team taught by a psychologist and a sociologist and met twice a week for 80 minutes per session. The class covered the general areas of gender history; physical and cognitive functioning; socialization; stereotypical processes and behaviors; sexual behavior; and consequences of gender identity and role sets within family groups, the workforce, and halls of power. Classroom techniques included dialogues in the round, panel debates, Socratic-style lectures, group exercises, and individual projects. Randomly chosen student groups were also required to address such topics as sexual harassment, women with careers having children, and men's ability to nurture children. To further develop critical thinking and empathic responses, students were required to participate in a group project titled "Metamorphosis," where students addressed the question, "What would happen if you found yourself living on a planet where you underwent a sex change every 5 years?" Results from pre/post questionnaires distributed in the course indicated that while students with hostile attitudes toward the opposite sex appeared to change their beliefs, many also indicated on the posttest that they viewed sports and combat as male roles, even when on the pretest they did not. (Includes student comments, the "Metamorphosis" exercise, and sample student journal entries.) (KP)

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Men and Women in Society: A Duality of Vision

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NISOD'S 16TH ANNUAL INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON TEACHING EXCELLENCE & CONFERENCE OF ADMINISTRATORS, MAY 22-25, 1994

PRESENTATION: MEN AND WOMEN IN SOCIETY: A DUALITY OF VISION

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Tomball College, Tomball TX

INTRODUCTION

This is an interdisciplinary course in gender issues examining the psychological and sociological realities of the sexes. Social change in the positions of men and women are felt not only at home, but at school, at work, and in the halls of power. In order to explore the paths of gender identity and roles, both psyche and behavior, within the communal world, instructors need to first clear away the assumptions and preconceptions created by stereotypes and past needs. Both male and female students need to determine their "common ground." In order to accomplish this, we designed a team-teaching course in gender issues centered on student involvement.

TEAM CREATION AND FUNCTION

The creation of the team is a complex matter. This mode of instruction has been done on college campuses in two different ways -- with both instructors present or with a single instructor for a particular section of the curriculum. We chose to have both present. In order to approach the student as a whole person, we believed it was necessary to structure the course curriculum so that, on any given day, students were presented with both psychological and sociological viewpoints.

The key to a working team is multifaceted. For example, instructors may disagree on paradigmatic perspectives. Questions arise as to how to present subject matter, so that students perceive the excitement of academic discovery and not see it as just another argument. Whatever the material or method of teaching chosen, the framework must allow students to see two professors

respectfully engaged in debate, discovery, and discourse without threat or endangerment to self. First, and foremost, they must be a team -- complementary, compatible, flexible, with the ability to communicate, having respect for one another's discipline, and most of all trust in each other's personal and professional judgment.

A good team will become an almost symbiotic entity. And nowhere can that be seen more readily than in the nature of student/instructor relations. Students may subconsciously feel that they can make appeals to one instructor over another. And they will attempt to do so. One method of dealing with that situation is not to make a decision on a student's request without talking to the teaching partner. Students should also be made aware that both instructors will be grading exams and papers and decisions will always be mutual.

COURSE FOCUS

Course planning is a cooperative, intensive process requiring time prior to the semester, during the semester, and after. The team will spend more time in preparation than teaching "solo." They must agree on such areas as course content, examination and grading procedures, evaluation of student progress and understanding as well as participation and attendance. Students must NOT face two differing sets of expectations from their instructors, nor be required to fulfill more than would be required in a "solo" taught course.

This class, meeting twice a week for 80 minutes per session, covered the general areas of gender history, physical and cognitive functioning, socialization, stereotypical processes and behaviors, sexual behavior, and consequences of gender identity and role sets within family groups, the work force and halls of power. Using Susan A. Basow's text, *Gender: Stereotypes and Roles,* provided students with a research-oriented format devoted to both the areas of sociology and psychology.

In order to provide a greater degree of gender diversity, we augmented our text offering with four male guest speakers as well as videos and outside readings devoted to male positions by males in the area of gender issues. Our statement to the class on opening day was that this course was not being presented to attack either sex. That we were, in fact, here to learn and understand the positions of each; how we arrived at them; what is our common ground; and where do we go from here.

What else then did we need to focus on in the teaching of this type of course? To use one word -- facilitation. That is not to say that our voices should always be passive. That would be far from the truth. But if we were to accomplish our aim of bringing students into the center of the learning process, to humanize the concepts and events that they were to be exposed to, then their voices had to assume an active role. This led us to use methods that centered on student discovery and evaluation, or as we term it, student-focused learning. For example, during that first class period, students were required to write a brief personal statement reflecting on why they were taking this course and what they expected from it. In other words, we wished to create an atmosphere in which critical understanding and thinking flourished (Karp, 1995). We wanted individuals with "a healthy skepticism about what is really true and accurate or real as well as a desire to search through all kinds of evidence to find that 'truth'" (Beyer, 1987:270).

Students were stimulated through such situations as dialogue in the round, panel debates, "Socratic" style lectures, group exercises, and individual projects. For example, panel debate assignments were randomized. Given the baggage that most of us carry in our gender roles, we extended that stimulation by randomly selecting students in terms of group, topic and position. They were required to address topics such as:

Sexual Harassment on the Job Is/Is Not a Reality in 1993;
Women Are/Are Not Too Expensive to Train for High Level Positions;
Women in Career Positions Should/Should Not Have Children;
Men Are/Are Not Able to Raise and Nurture Their Children.

Due to the intense involvement of both student debaters and audience, panel debates, originally scheduled for thirty minute segments, were restructured into one hour blocks. This method of learning demonstrated the cognitive and emotional impact that inductive reasoning has on students even when they must defend a position counter to their own belief system. Such defense can even become a revelation for the individual. This was perceived in a brief statement made by a woman in her late twenties, "Sexual harassment is not only a reality in 1993, it is a reality for men as well as women. I ought to know, I've engaged in it."

In order to further develop critical thinking and empathic responses, we required students to participate in a group project titled "Metamorphosis." (A copy of the exercise was handed out to the audience and will be found in Appendix A.) Students were asked to address the question: "What would happen if you found yourself living on a planet where you underwent a sex change every five years?" Let us explain. On the planet, Empath, transmogrification is a natural state of life. Volunteers from Earth (student groups of four) came to Empath to negotiate a peace treaty. In order to do so, they underwent a process which allowed them to experience being both male and female. In other words, they had to live as natural Empathians, changing sex every five years. Of course, as Earth beings, this had to be artificially induced through the use of an initial injection given upon arrival.. This arrangement would last for twenty-five years. They would then return home to relate what it meant to experience the world of the male and the world of the female from the shoes of that sex. We would like you to visit with one of our student groups and their vision of experience and return. (We are including below the text of that video for the reading audience.)

RECAPITULATION OF THE METAMORPHOSIS VIDEO SHOWN AT NISOD

Scene: Three students sitting at table discussing their upcoming return to Earth from Empath.

Margaret: I tell you what. I am ready to go home! The first person I want to see is my dad. I can understand now so much more about being a man. I can see so much about why my dad was the way he was. It's amazing how much you learn when you stand in someone else's shoes. I remember how often he used to warn me about men. He'd say things like, "Girl, men undress women with their eyes." Now, having been a man, I understand. When I saw those chicks walking by, I'd undress them with my eyes. That was wild.

Beth: I know what you mean. I'm ready, though I seem to be taking a lot of baggage back that I brought with me.

Margaret: Well, I liked being a woman. I'll be glad to get out of male clothes and have my hair and nails done again. Are you guys ready?

Beth: Well, I tell you they've given me so much stuff to think about. (She picks up a large bag and pulls out a dog bone.) I keep looking at all this stuff and, you know, personally, I'm tired of being the junkyard dog.

Margaret: I don't understand. What do you mean?

Beth: Well, you know, how on earth we always had to carry all that identity junk with us. As a woman I always felt on the defensive. I've learned something up here. That person over there, he's not after trying to knock that chip off my shoulder. You know, maybe I need to listen to him. It certainly was awfully difficult when I was sitting behind his desk. As a woman, I'd think he was looking at me one way. But when I got changed and turned into a man, it wasn't the way I thought. I saw things a little bit differently than what I expected. I'm going to go back and just leave the junkyard dog role behind me.

(She pulls out of the bag a violin.) I came up here and this was what we all came with in the first place. I was playing this tune (violin played quite off key). We all seemed to think it was such a good tune. And I certainly had worked hard enough on it. But you know, maybe we ALL need to learn a different tune.

Margaret: You're right, maybe after we've been through this, we can see the other side. But even here on Empath, there still seems to be some of what we faced on Earth.

Joey: What do you mean?

Margaret: I'll never forget this bank teller. I went to cash my check and she said, "Do you sign on this account?" And it was my company! Then I thought that she was just

doing her job. But you know, I went back two weeks later when I was a man, and they didn't ask me those questions. But why fight it, it was really her problem, not mine.

Beth: But, isn't that the way it was, that old tune? What worries me is we've been told "you can't go home again." And Joey, tomorrow we're leaving.

Joey: You know at first, I was looking forward to going back to normal. But after twenty-five years of being in such a tolerant society, I'm not sure I want to. We've come a long way since Earth's twentieth century, but we still have lots of things to improve.

Margaret: Yes, but I want to go back to just one role, my role as a woman. I want to be protected by a man. Honestly, being a man is too stressful. It gave me grey hair and I didn't like it. There were just too many problems being a man.

Joey: It is easier taking on just one role. It took so much effort to see both sides. And then there were those mechanical changes every five years.

Beth: You know, Joey, what Margaret said is so true. What about when you had that little bout, you know (and then she holds her arms in a rocking motion as if holding a baby)...

Joey: Oh, you're talking about my accident as a woman. You know, I don't think that my manly life on Earth prepared me for giving birth.

Beth: (holds up book) Do you remember this book, "Loving Each Other?"

Joey: You know I found that kind of difficult on Empath. I mean the idea that they have life mates rather than man or wife.

Beth: But you know we're all striving for the same thing, to be loved and valued. I mean Remember our learning about soulmates. Maybe we have two different ways of looking at it, but if we all walk together, listen to each other, then maybe we would have a better time.

Margaret: What have we learned? How are we going to take our twenty-five years of being both man and woman and somehow make that a learning experience for, not just ourselves, but the people back on Earth?

Joey: Well, you've stayed in touch with your family, haven't you?

Margaret: Yes. I have a son on Earth and I'm anxious to get back to see him and how he's changed. I feel like I can relate to him better now because I've been a man too. So hopefully we can have a better relationship. That's the one thing I really regret

about volunteering for this, because well, even though we video talk all the time, we've missed that bonding time together.

Beth: Do we think that we are all in tune or do we still have some work to do? We've got our passports for Earth. But let's make sure each of us understands our own tune.

Margaret: (She picks up the violin and starts to play a slightly less off-key tune.)

At the end of this video, during our regular class session, the question arose: "Empath is supposed to be an androgenous planet. But each of you is still maintaining masculine and feminine roles as we know them. If it's really androgenous, why is it so difficult to assume a change in gender identity?"

Joey: Well, they're not androgynous. They do have chemical body changes. They completely change from male to female and back every five years. So you are going to have differences in perception.

Margaret: What we were trying to get at is what we have learned over the twenty-five years on Empath. So that's what we talked about. How are we going to take our 25 years of experience back to help those on Earth better themselves? If we have somehow bettered ourselves, come to understand more, maybe we can influence how men and women see each other.

As you can see, what this video is still saying is that gender identity permeates everything one is and does. The question of "person" is difficult to address, even by those placed in a situation as variable as the one on "Empath." The question for both student and teacher alike is, "Can we ever separate, transcend, or claim an identity free of gender expectations? Can a world view ever be created gender-neutral? How often does gender get in the way of looking at someone as a person? But do we want it that way? What would change?

Each of our groups approached this presentation in a different way. The majority, it seemed, were able to refocus their thinking to maximize the empathic nature of this project. But two out of our nine groups appeared completely unable or unwilling to take on the identity of the "other" and leave any stereotypical ideas and behaviors behind. Even as they changed sex, they assumed what they believed to be the prejudices of the other sex. Furthermore, we were not able to determine whether

this was a product of group interaction or individual leanings. One of the nine groups chose to write and read individual journals expressing their sojourn on Empath. This enabled each to express him/herself without group input or pressure. (See one example in Appendix B.)

NISOD PRESENTATION ACTIVITY

Having briefly mentioned these tools designed to encourage personal growth, we could now continue to verbally expand on each. However, we believe that participation in an actual exercise might be not only more interesting, but more enlightening. With the audience's cooperation, we will begin the "Ideal Male/Female Auction." The beginning process of values clarification begun in the second week of the semester enabled students to recognize what they valued most in the opposite sex. Students were asked to bid on some twenty characteristics. A budget of $20,000 was available to each and bid in increments of $100 and up. Due to time constraints, we will limit this auction to five characteristics. As you see, the five factors listed for the ideal male are wealth, sense of humor, friend, handsome, and intelligent. The five factors for the ideal female are her love for me, good body, sexual responsiveness, family-oriented, and intelligent. (It should be noted, at this point, that the conference audience was approximately 1/3 male and 1/3 female, much the same as our class composition. Moreover, the activity demonstrated the capacity to generate strong feelings for our conference group as they had for our students. Both appeared to surprise themselves and others by what they were willing to risk on a certain characteristic. Discussion, following the auction, appeared to bring about the beginnings of self-evaluation for each.)

EVALUATION

In order to better judge the ability of this class to expand students' knowledge of the subject matter as well as enhance, modify or change attitudes, we used a pretest/postest questionnaire as well as the normal evaluation procedure. In examining the latter, we found that each of the students, with

the exception of one, appeared to feel that the class had an important impact on their lives. Here are some of the comments:

"I can now let my twelve year-old son cry over a sad story and feel that it is all right."
"I went home and discussed this class with my parents and children, and we've really come to some new understandings."
"I liked having two different viewpoints (referring to two teachers). It gave me more to think about."
"This class has made me more aware of the obstacles I'm up against."
"I question more issues now than ever before."
"It made me more aware of feeling, words I say, (made me) a better person."
"I was the classic female chauvinist. This class changed many opinions and gave me a new way to look at men and the problems which they experience."
"I think that the curriculum is too liberal. I don't agree with a lot of the materials taught. To my liberal friends, I would recommend this."
"Opposing viewpoints made us think."
"It raised questions within myself."
"I can see already the effects in my life and relationships that this class has had."
"I feel challenged to become more aware and honest; feel I'm more open-minded."
"It was challenging to my beliefs."
"(Course) opened my eyes to see the stereotypes and how they developed."
"Better understanding of men and women and how they relate to each other in society."

The former presented an interesting dichotomy. On one hand we found that egalitarian attitudes towards females in terms of changing male/female relationships, family, corporate and governing work roles had become enhanced. Those with prior attitudes of hostility towards the other sex appeared to change their beliefs. However, when we looked at questions concerned with sports such as football or the participation of women in combat roles, just the opposite occurred. Both males and females perceived these areas as the province of the male, even when initially they had not. The question this left us with was twofold: Was this due to our not covering those areas in the curriculum or an effect generated by the heightened egalitarian beliefs in the previously mentioned areas. Does the changing of social reality in some areas bring about the need for holding tighter to stereotypes in other areas? Addressing those questions will assume a high priority in the teaching of our next gender course.

CONCLUSION

Up until this point, we have been discussing some of what took place during the semester and the benefits it had for our students. There are also benefits for those teaching. This was an exciting semester for both of us. Certainly it raised issues that we intend to pursue. The evaluations received demonstrated the capacity of the subject matter and methodology used to raise both students' academic knowledge and personal growth. Quite frankly, there are also other benefits generated by the process of interdisciplinary team-teaching. Some of those advantages include: non-threatening feedback from teacher to teacher; an expansion of one's knowledge base, and the broadening of one's teaching methods. And now, in accordance with the process of learning, we will terminate our formal presentation and call for questions from the audience. Curriculum guides and course materials are available to interested parties upon request.

APPENDIX B: Student Journal Entry for Metamorphosis Project

Journal Entries of My Life on Empath

2193 -- February

We arrived on the planet Empath just days ago. Immediately we were taken to the clinic where we were administered our injections. I arrived with three others who I am currently friends with. We all decided that it would be best to maintain a journal throughout the twenty-five years we are to remain on this planet. Because this place so resembles the Earth in every way, except for the gender transition every five years, my journal will not be maintained everyday. Although I intend for it to be thorough, I really expect a normal life, at least for the first five years.

2200 -- January

Well, let me catch you up. It has been exactly one year from the big change. So much has happened. I totally forgot that the change was about to occur last year. I had not prepared for it at all. Nothing to wear. I ended up with a very nice (female) body, but the functioning of this body was something I should have read about. Walking was somewhat of a chore which I eventually mastered. Going to the bathroom was not so different other than the position in which I went. My monthly period was what put me over the edge though. What an event. I can stand the sight of blood from anyone except myself. Especially when it is one of those heavy days. I fainted three times. I must say that I do not miss shaving every morning. I still have to shave my legs, but like most girls do I sometimes leave it and just wear pants. The armpits are always maintained, although I do occasionally get razor burn.

After my change, I had a whole new set of emotions. One night I was at a bar having a drink, or maybe a few drinks, and I got really drunk. The next thing I know I am waking up to this incredible looking man. I felt really guilty after I sobered up. As a good Catholic girl, I confessed this happening to my priest and he informed me that severe consequences would follow if I kept this up. I listened to what he said, but then something else happened. I was pregnant. I was devastated. But I don't believe in abortion, so I had no other choice. So here I am, a year later, with a wonderful baby boy and I am engaged to be married to his wonderful daddy. Well, that is about it. I will make another entry in a few years or whenever something exciting happens.

P.S. I've taken a female name.

2204 -- January

I sat up last night and didn't sleep just so I could witness the transformation. I really didn't want to change. I was having a great time. My husband was taking really good care of me and we were very happy--until he became a she, and then we became lesbians! I guess that's when I became ready to change again. We tried sex that way, but it really wasn't for us. Therefore we remained celibate for about two years. Not to mention he makes a really ugly woman.

Anyway, the transformation was incredible! You never know what you've got until it is taken from you. I hate shaving my face again. But I love not bleeding every month. I did get over the fainting spells. Sex has resumed and is just wonderful. That's about it for now. I'll enter some more in a few years.

P.S. I retook my male name.

2209-- June

Ah, I'm back. My child changed several years ago, but had minor problems with it. You know they teach all about that in his..er..her school. I guess the biggest news to report is that I have decided that I prefer being a woman. I am going to find someone who will change me forever. No really, I think life is easier as a woman. There isn't so much expected from you. A lot of the pressure is gone. Who knows, I'll check in perhaps in a year or so.

2209 -- December

I'm devastated. I found a lump in my breast. The doctor's think it may be cancer. They discussed what would happen if it was. I am so scared. My husband/wife won't want me any more.

2210 -- June

I had to have a mastectomy. I feel ugly. My husband/wife has been very supportive, but I feel half the woman I used to be. I can't stop crying. At least it is over. I can't wait to become a man again. I hate being a woman.

2212 -- July

It has only been two years. Things have not been going too well. In fact, it has been really hard for me in the past years. My marriage was going really well for a while. We both made changes and everything seemed okay. Then it happened. Another lump. This time the other breast had to go. After surgery, I again went into a deep depression. Then our sex life stopped completely. He never came home. He was having an affair. Did I blame him? I couldn't attract him anymore. Why should he have to suffer as well. Soon after we split up. Then he asked for a divorce. I missed him. Then something amazing happened. I stopped feeling sorry for myself and realized what a piece of worthless trash he was. I sued him for everything... and won! For sickness and in health, ha! Now I feel like more of a woman than I ever did. All it took was for me to realize that I was relying on my breasts to make me feel like a real woman!

P.S. I Am Woman, Hear Me Roar! (at least for a few more months)

2214 -- February

Wow! What a freaky five years. I am glad to be a man again. I no longer desire to remain a woman. It was amazing the things I have learned though from my experiences as a woman.

2218 -- January

Love is in the air. I am dating again. A wonderful girl named Tiffany. I look forward to returning to Earth to preach the knowledge that I have obtained. Women are no different from men, apart from the toilet thing, and if I changed tomorrow, which I would if I don't go home, I wouldn't mind it one bit. I made a fine woman. I make a fine man. If we could only put everyone into the shoes of the opposite gender for just a short bit of time, there really would be an entirely new world out there.

Conclusion: It is a very good idea for Earth to colonize with the people of Empath. But remember, there has been several hundred years of conditioning the "Man is Superior to Woman" concept and it will not be reversed overnight. My suggestion is that integration be taken at a very slow pace and with much caution and with many psychologists available for counseling.

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APPENDIX A -- PROJECT METAMORPHOSIS

METAMORPHOSIS

In the year 2193, space explorers from the planet Earth discovered a new star system. Within this system, there was only one M planet, one planet that could maintain life. Unfortunately, shortly after landing on the only habitable part of the planet, these explorers offended the people and leaders of the standing government of Empath.

In order to be allowed to return and negotiate a treaty of peace and cooperation, earth explorers had to promise to send small groups of young (ages 25 to 30) male and female social and biological scientists to Empath. The purpose: to come to a full understanding of Empathic culture so that such offensive behavior would never again occur. The method: to be injected with a material that would change human beings from earth into homo sapiens of Empath and, therefore, require them to live the life of Empathics for a period of twenty-five years. When this period had passed, the groups would return to their original state and begin the process of treaty negotiation.

In communicating with Earth, the explorers find that there are many groups eager to participate in this endeavor. For many, it is a grand adventure. For others, it is a way into the history books and the promise of a long, rewarding career. For all, it will become a strange journey for the people of Empath are different in a very unusual way. Oh yes, they are human beings just like the residents of Earth. Males and females are physically structured just as beings on Earth. But...Empath is an androgynous planet where individuals are transmogrified. Transmogrification means to change into a different shape or form. On this planet, men change into women and women change into men emotionally and physically every five years.

Each of you will become a member of one of those volunteer groups, a person taking on the transmutations of the humans on Empath. For twenty-five years you will have to live as they do, undergoing the metamorphosis from male/female to female/male every five years. You will have to deal with the same issues involved in such a transmutation: senses of personal being and power, social and recreational activities, family situations including child-bearing and child-rearing, occupational choices and work policies, corporate and political leadership and sexually appropriate behavior. It is your job to fit into the society on Empath and, at the end of your term, explain to those on earth what life was like in such a society; how Empathians deal with the issues listed above.

Your group will be asked to make an oral and written presentation about life on Empath. Your oral presentation may include any of the following: formal presentation, skit demonstrating some phase of life on Empath and/or visual aids to explain changes in one's duties as one shifts from one gender identity to another. The written presentation will be the recommendations made to Earth's leaders in regard to the proposed peace treaty and the nature of future co-existence, if any, between the two planets.

Students will be graded on the degree of willingness to deal with the issues stated above and the logic of their reasoning as they attempt to solve the difficulties presented by frequent changes in sexual identity for both the person and the society.

Note: If one was really from Empath, would "difficulties" be an accurate description? Or was that the offense committed by the explorers?

"Metamorphosis" may only be reprinted with the permission of the authors.